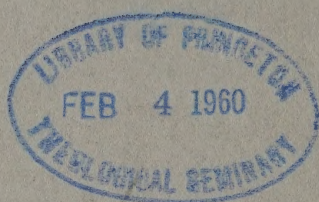


C.R. Thompson

The Bible in English
1525-1611

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FOLGER BOOKLETS
ON TUDOR AND STUART CIVILIZATION

THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH

1525-1611

By Craig R. Thompson



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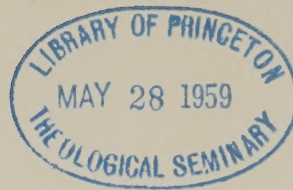
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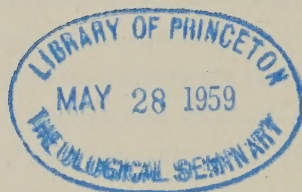
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WITH a few negligible exceptions, Tudor Englishmen, Christians in a realm officially Christian, accepted without question the unique authority of the Bible. Catholic and Protestant might disagree over the relationship between Bible and Church, but both knew the Scriptures were divinely inspired and therefore totally different from all other writings in character and purpose. The Bible is a book—words. As words, it could be treated like other books, copied, sold, illustrated, annotated, translated. As divine revelation, it required to be read, preached, believed, obeyed, for it was the record wherein God spoke to man.

No English translation of the complete New Testament was in print until 1526, none of the complete Bible until 1535. In the next generation, translations became plentiful enough, and in Elizabeth's reign cheap enough, to be within the means of the ordinary man. Printing, Protestantism, and a long series of experiments in translating the Bible made the English "the people of a book, and that book was the Bible." Gradually the phrases and rhythms of the English Bible were absorbed and imitated; they became naturalized, a part of English speech. It is no accident, then, that the most popular version of the world's most popular book is an early seventeenth-century revision of sixteenth-century work. That this "Authorized" or "Royal" or "King James" Bible of 1611 will be the one most widely used half a century from now is not likely, but its place in the religious and literary history of English-speaking peoples is secure.

In the medieval Church, the Bible used was the Latin version now generally called the Vulgate. This was prepared by St. Jerome, who undertook it at the request of Pope Damasus (*ca.* 382). Jerome produced a New Testament and two versions

of the Psalms by revising, with the aid of Greek texts, the existing "Old Latin" versions. Later (405) he issued a Latin Old Testament translated from the Hebrew. The Vulgate was not actually made official until the sixteenth century, when the Council of Trent declared it the authentic Bible (1546) and Pope Clement VIII issued a revised and official text (1592).

Partial translations and paraphrases of the Bible had been made in England since Anglo-Saxon times, but no complete translation is known for certain before the late fourteenth century. The first demonstrable version of the complete Bible into English is connected with the name of John Wyclif, the Oxford reformer. Probably little of it is from his pen, but the conception was his. He and his followers, the Lollards, emphasized in their preaching the supreme authority of the Scriptures. But to "search the Scriptures" men needed a Bible in their own tongue. To fill this need the Wyclifites made two translations from the Vulgate. The earlier (*ca.* 1381-1383), by Nicholas Hereford, was a word-for-word rendering; the revision of this, by John Purvey and others (*ca.* 1395), less literal and less Latinate. For example, where the earlier version has in Psalm 23:1-2, "The Lord governeth me and no thing to me shall lack; in the place of leswe [pasture] where he me full set. Over water of fulfilling he nourished me; my soul he converted," the later one reads: "The Lord governeth me and no thing shall fail to me; in the place of pasture there he hath set me. He nourished me on the water of refreshing; he converted my soul."

To appreciate what the Bible in their own tongue meant to sixteenth-century Englishmen, we must recall how long it took to reach them in printed form, approved or unapproved, and how deeply involved with other questions was this one of a vernacular Bible. "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," declared Wyclif, quoting Jerome. Yet in 1408 the Synod of Oxford forbade translation of the Bible into English and the expounding of any translation that had not been inspected. No translation, past (Wyclifite) or future, might be read, publicly or privately, unless approved. Disobedience made the offender liable to the charge of heresy. Why this hostility to the vernacu-

lar Bible for the laity?² Not from bigotry but from principle and conservatism: from the prevalent theory of the Christian Church and of a Christian society and from the habitual resistance of the official mind to innovation. Prelates objected on political and linguistic as well as religious grounds. They quoted from Jerome a familiar passage on the difficulty of translation. When Thomas More cited this same passage against Tyndale in 1528, Tyndale's answer was: Jerome made a translation, "Why may not we also?" Because (went the argument) misunderstanding might result; and this, by producing wrong beliefs, might imperil one's soul and the souls of others. From Wyclif's day to Tyndale's we meet the same argument again and again. In 1542 the Bishop of London refused to have anything to do with a scheme for a new translation, saying, "I will never be guilty to bring the simple people into error." More denounced Tyndale's translation but regretted the lack of a better, confessing he did not know why none had been made. When one should appear, all copies, he thought, ought to be kept by bishops, who would lend them from time to time to respectable persons.

A medieval theologian might know his Bible well, an ordinary priest rarely did, a layman very rarely indeed. Books were scarce and were therefore valuable property—too costly for students, who rented them instead, a quire or so at a time, from stationers licensed and strictly supervised by the universities. Chaucer's clerk of Oxford dreams of someday owning twenty volumes, but it is only a dream. After the middle of the fifteenth century, thanks to printing, such dreams could become realities. Printing revolutionized the book trade, multiplied the number of books and readers, changed reading habits,¹ methods of

¹ Before the era of printing, books were commonly read aloud (and therefore much more slowly), even when one read to oneself. The Bible affords an interesting example in Acts 8:26-39. Philip asks the Ethiopian, who is reading Isaiah as his chariot jogs along, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" He knows what the man is reading because he *hears* him. Until printing came, ideas about the nature of literature and criticism were based on the assumption that literature is mainly an auditory art. Printing made it mainly a visual one and gradually transformed conceptions of style, artistic originality, literary property, and so on.

scholarship, and conceptions of literature. Books could now be issued in hundreds or even thousands of copies, each with the same text on corresponding pages; this was not true of manuscripts. Now there could be standard texts to quote from or refer to. (The Bible had no chapters until the thirteenth century, no numbered verses until the sixteenth.) Moreover, the introduction of printing coincided with important developments in philology. Printing and philology together made textual and historical criticism possible and so opened a new epoch in Biblical studies.

The famous 42-line Gutenberg Bible (1456) was the first of many editions of the Vulgate printed in the fifteenth century. A complete Hebrew Bible was printed in 1488; an edition of the Greek New Testament, by Erasmus, in 1516. By 1500 translations of the Bible had appeared in most major European languages except English. In England the unfavorable attitude of ecclesiastical authorities, who were suspicious of anything that smacked of Lollardry, apparently made the venture too risky even for an enterprising publisher like Caxton.

The Reformation did more than anything else to assure a printed Bible in English. In Lutheran and Reformed theology, the Bible was central. Tyndale, a partisan of such theology, sums up the argument for translation as a preference for light instead of darkness: to walk in darkness is to stumble, and "to stumble is the danger of eternal damnation." He translated that poor folk "might also read and see the simple word of God." But is the Bible "simple"? Yes, said the Reformers, in that the Gospels tell us plainly what is needful for salvation. To this their adversaries retorted that since the Bible after all came from the Church, it required authoritative interpretation by the Church. Translation could not be left to unauthorized amateurs.

The Bible makes every demand on the translator made by any ancient text, and more, because he may not take the liberties with a sacred book that he takes with others. Too much is at stake. He must be accurate at all costs, must care more for matter than for style. Still, the Tudor translators were men of their times, dependent on the same stock of language as other

men, and anxious to produce translations other men could and would read. The spirit in which they approached their text differed from that of other translators, but their purely linguistic resources were the same.

In addition to close knowledge of his original, the translator needs sympathetic understanding of its spirit, its "atmosphere." His grasp of his own language must be sensitive enough to make his version more than merely reliable. It must also be readable, idiomatic English: dignified but not affected, colloquial without being vulgar. The Rheims New Testament (1582) with its *agnition, comessations, exinanited, prefinition*, its "Give us today our supersubstantial bread" sometimes made unnecessary difficulties. The conservative Bishop Gardiner had once proposed (1542) that translators keep certain essential terms in Latin; these included *Christus, Dominus, Spiritus Sanctus, ecclesia, episcopus, charitas, gratia*. Had this advice been heeded, the ordinary reader would have been little better off than he was before. Cheke, Gardiner's contemporary, tried with some success to make his own version of Matthew as "Saxon" as possible, but his *frosent* for *apostles*, *freshman* for *proselyte*, *ground-wrought* for *founded*, *hunderder* for *centurion* have a strange look today. The Englishman needed a Bible in plain, familiar English, not one with crucial words left in a foreign tongue or rendered by newfangled expressions he never heard of. The versions of Tyndale and his followers he could read. Their publication was a triumph for the English language as much as for new ideas.

That the English in the sixteenth century became a Bible-reading people is at once evident from the number of translations printed and reprinted, apart from abundant evidence of other kinds. The Bible of 1611 was only the latest and best of a long line. Its main predecessors may now be briefly described.

Because of its enduring influence on the language of the English Bible, the greatest of these was the first, William Tyndale's. Rebuffed by the Bishop of London whose support he sought for his project of translating the New Testament from Greek, Tyndale went to Germany in 1524. His translation, made

from Erasmus' Greek text, Luther's German version, and the Vulgate, was ready to print in 1525 at Cologne. Before Matthew was finished, work was interrupted and Tyndale had to flee. A fragment of a single copy of this Cologne printing of 1525 survives. We hear of a quarto and an octavo edition printed shortly afterward (1526) at Worms. Of the octavo, two copies (one incomplete) survive. Various reprints appeared between 1526 and 1532, an unauthorized revision in 1534, then a revision by Tyndale himself (also 1534). Tyndale's work on the Old Testament was cut short by martyrdom in 1536. His versions of the Pentateuch and Jonah were published in 1530-1531. Other portions of the Old Testament, left in manuscript translation, were printed after his death.

The quality of Tyndale's translations and their place in the development of English prose deserve far more space than can be given to them here. Diction and rhythms of the King James New Testament owe more to him than to any other single translator. Many of its more familiar phrases come from him, but merely to quote some would not, in itself, show the extent of indebtedness. In the following verses (Luke 15:1-7) there are more differences between Tyndale and the 1611 Bible than in some others, yet even here it is obvious that the 1611 version is mostly Tyndale's (1534):

TYNDALE

Then resorted unto him all the publicans and sinners, for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying: He receiveth to his company sinners, and eateth with them. Then put he forth this similitude to them, saying: What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he find him? And when he hath found him, he putteth him on his shoulders with joy: and as soon as he cometh home, he calleth together his lovers and neighbors, saying unto them: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

KING JAMES

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners, for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying: this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying: What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Tyndale's language is plain, direct, forceful, more colloquial sometimes than are later translations. The serpent tells Eve, "Tush, ye shall not die"; the Lord was with Joseph "and he was a lucky fellow"; St. Paul sails "after the Easter holidays." It was the language of Tyndale's time, often made eloquent by his earnestness, his sense of urgency. More attacked him for using *seniors* or *elders* instead of *priests*, *congregation* instead of *church*, *love* instead of *charity*. This was no pedantic quarrel. In an age when men were burned or beheaded—the fates of Tyndale and More—for their theological opinions, the implications of theological terms were desperately important. Tyndale avoided the customary terms because they were associated too closely with a system and a set of claims he rejected. More thought new terms could only confuse readers and might unsettle their orthodoxy. Likewise he denounced Tyndale's prologues and notes, which were often Lutheran in tone.

Authority reacted strongly to Tyndale's work. Copies of the 1526 New Testament were promptly banned and if found were destroyed by the English government. A few years later a royal injunction (1530) forbade buying or keeping an English Bible. Yet before Tyndale's death a complete English Bible had come out (1535) with official permission. Political winds had shifted: Henry had broken with the papacy, become "Supreme Head"

of the English Church, and changed his policy with respect to an English Bible.

The first entire Bible printed in English was the work of Miles Coverdale, a Cambridge graduate whose interest in the Reformers took him abroad. He was grieved, he says, "that other nations should be more plenteously provided for with the Scripture in their mother tongue than we." Archbishop Cranmer had tried in vain to prod the bishops into making a translation. Their failure and the Crown's growing interest in an English version made the time ripe for Coverdale. His Bible appeared in 1535, inscribed to Henry, "our Moses." It was printed somewhere on the Continent. Two editions printed in England were issued in 1537. One announces that the book is "set forth with the King's most gracious license."

Coverdale says he translated out of "Dutch [German] and Latin" and used "five sundry interpreters." One was Tyndale, another Luther. For all but one (Jonah) of the last fourteen books of the Old Testament, Coverdale's was the earliest printed English version. It was likewise the earliest of the Apocrypha. The Pentateuch and New Testament were revisions of Tyndale, but Coverdale changed or omitted Tyndale's offending notes, and unlike Tyndale he did not insist on *congregation* for *church*, *repentance* for *penance*. This restraint was one reason for his success. Coverdale's most lasting legacy to the English Church was the Psalter, for his is the earliest form of the Psalter used in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Both in the Psalter and elsewhere he gave us phrases that became too familiar to replace: "Thou anointest my head with oil," "valley of the shadow of death," "sufficient unto the day," "I am become as sounding brass."

The next translation, "Matthew's Bible" (Antwerp, 1537) consisted of Coverdale's Old Testament from the end of Chronicles, Coverdale's Apocrypha, the 1535 revision of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament, plus a version of Joshua—II Chronicles inclusive which was very likely Tyndale's. More of Tyndale's work appeared in this Bible than in any other. "Thomas Matthew," said on the title-page to be the translator, is regarded

by nearly all scholars as a pseudonym for John Rogers, a companion of Tyndale, who prepared the work for the press.

The Matthew Bible had official approval, for since Archbishop Cranmer was unable to interest the bishops in making a translation, he persuaded the King's Vicar-General, Thomas Cromwell, to license this Bible, which he said he liked "better than any other translation heretofore made." Thus Tyndale's work, forbidden during Henry's reign when put forth under Tyndale's name, was transmitted, ironically enough, by a Bible having the government's sanction.

A revision of Matthew's Bible by Richard Taverner was published by the King's Printer in 1539. Taverner was a sound scholar whose work had merit, but his book could not compete successfully with another Bible issued about the same time or shortly afterward.

This other version was the Great Bible, so called because of its size. It was a revision of the Matthew Bible by Coverdale "and divers excellent learned men," who made liberal use also of a new Latin version by Sebastian Münster. Printing began in Paris, was interrupted by the Inquisition, and resumed in London. The first edition bore the date 1539, but there is reason to think that it did not actually appear until 1540; then six more followed before the end of 1541. On its title-page the book had a picture of the King, flanked by Cromwell and Cranmer, his chief administrators, who present copies to his joyous subjects. Because Cranmer contributed a preface included in the April, 1540, and subsequent editions, this Bible is sometimes called "Cranmer's." Because Cromwell had supported it financially and in other ways, it is sometimes named after him too. Cromwell, however, was removed from office and executed shortly after its publication (July, 1540). His coat of arms was omitted from the title-page of the next edition; Cranmer's remained.

The Great Bible had more powerful backing than any other to date. The second edition proclaimed, "This is the Bible appointed to the use of the churches." Before the first edition had appeared, Cromwell ordered the clergy to see that every parish church obtain a copy on publication.

The placing of an English Bible in every church was an exciting event in English religious history; how exciting may be inferred from a royal proclamation (1541) rebuking those who read or discuss it "with loud and high voices" while Mass is celebrated. One writer (1539) tells us that men now read the Bible instead of Arthurian romances. It is true that for a time servants, laborers, and housewives were forbidden by law to read it (1542-1543), even in private, but such restrictions vanished in the next reign, that of Edward VI (1547-1553), when Bibles were printed and circulated freely. Printing of the book stopped during Mary Tudor's reign (1553-1558), but as soon as Elizabeth came to the throne (1558) the Great Bible and Prayer Book were restored to churches, and both printing and translating of the Bible could be resumed.

The first Elizabethan translation was made by a group of Marian exiles in Geneva, chief among them William Whittingham, who was, he says, "moved with zeal, counselled by the godly, and drawn by occasion, both of the place where God hath appointed us to dwell, and also of the store of heavenly learning and judgment, which so aboundeth in this city of Geneva, that justly it may be called the patron and mirror of true religion and godliness." Whittingham's New Testament appeared in 1557; the complete Bible, in which he had assistance from Anthony Gilby and Thomas Sampson, in 1560. This was dedicated to Elizabeth by her "humble subjects of the English Church at Geneva." For the New Testament, Whittingham used, in addition to the Greek text, Latin, French, and English versions; and for the 1560 edition he revised his work of 1557. The Old Testament was a revision of the Great Bible but based on a fresh comparison of the Hebrew. Both Testaments had chapter summaries and marginal notes.

This Geneva Bible was a landmark, rivaled in importance and influence only by the Tyndale and 1611 Bibles. Its roman and italic type, instead of black letter, set new fashions in Bible printing. It was the first English Bible to divide the text into numbered verses. Whittingham took pride in keeping Hebraisms but added explanatory words to make them more intelligible.

By and large the language was clear and unaffected; the translators strove after "propriety of the words and perspicuity of the phrase." Except in the New Testament, where the influence of Tyndale predominates, the Geneva contributed more to the King James Bible than did any other single version. It quickly became the cheap, popular version of the Scriptures; for well over half a century this was the Bible most read by Englishmen and most often reprinted. Because of its connections with Calvinism, it was especially favored by the Puritans. Apparently it was also the version that Shakespeare, no Puritan, knew best.

After Elizabeth's accession, the Great Bible was reprinted (1562). Certain bishops had expressed dissatisfaction with it as early as 1542, when Convocation voted to amend it. Nothing was done until Archbishop Parker, in 1565 or thereabouts, revived Cranmer's project of a translation made by bishops. Accordingly a committee of some sixteen bishops went to work. They were told to follow the Great Bible, change it only where the original was rendered inaccurately, take advantage of recent Latin translations, and avoid contentious notes and coarse or unedifying words. Parker himself prepared Genesis, Matthew, and some of the Pauline epistles as well as the introductory material. As revisers he and his collaborators made many changes in the Great Bible, borrowing frequently from the recent Geneva version. The Psalter in the Bishops' Bible is an interesting and often independent translation.

The Bishops' Bible, issued in 1568 (revised edition 1572) was a magnificent and costly black-letter folio. It included portraits of the Queen (on the title-page) and her favorite advisers, Leicester (preceding the first page of Joshua) and Cecil (on the first page of the Psalms). In the Folger Library is a copy of this Bible covered with crimson velvet and with Elizabeth's arms and initials stamped on the central gold boss, the Tudor rose on the other bosses; the portraits of Leicester and Cecil are colored.

The Bishops' Bible had little chance of rivaling the Geneva version in popular esteem, but its official status as the Bible read in divine service made it familiar to everybody. Any translation heard at least once a week, year after year, is bound to become

familiar. If, in addition, the book is used in solemn rites and expounded as revealed truth, its language will soon acquire special authority.

The only Tudor translation of the Bible by and for Roman Catholics, the Rheims-Douai (New Testament, 1582; Old Testament, 1609–1610), came from English priests living in exile in France. It was planned and supervised by William, later Cardinal, Allen, founder of the English College at Douai. He wanted to equip priests—whose training was entirely in Latin—with a knowledge of the Bible in English in order to help them confute their opponents, who, he remarks, had the Scriptures at their finger tips. Gregory Martin, like Allen a former Oxford scholar, did most of the translating. He began late in 1578, translated two chapters a day, and finished in less than four years. He had some help from others, including Allen, who wrote most of the copious and polemical notes.

This Bible differed from all other Tudor ones: it came from Roman Catholics; it originated in a desire to provide for the clergy, whereas Tyndale and the other early translators had been concerned initially about laymen; unlike Tyndale and others who had translated from Hebrew and Greek, Martin used as his basic text the Latin Vulgate, declared by the Council of Trent to be the authentic Scriptures, though he consulted other texts. The preface, in contrast to those of Protestant Bibles, began by denying that “the Holy Scriptures should always be in our mother tongue, or that they ought or were ordered by God to be read indifferently of all, or could be easily understood of every one that readeth or heareth them in a known language.” But in these bad times “special consideration” made a vernacular translation desirable. In the good old days, before “heretical” translations abounded, “there was not so much chatting and jangling of God’s word, but much more sincere dealing, doing, and keeping the same.”

The Rheims New Testament was a well-printed book and a usually accurate, at times admirable, translation of the Latin version, most of it in plain and fairly simple English. But a desire to ensure correctness by keeping as close as possible to the

Latin when rendering technical terms led the translators here and there to use words foreign to English ears. A glossary at the end of the book explains some of these: for instance, *arch-synagogue* (high priest), *azymes* (unleavened bread), *dominical day* (Sunday), *donaries* (temple offerings), *Pasche* (Easter), *loaves of proposition* (showbread). The translators' desire to avoid question-begging terms was surely legitimate, but their Latinate English produced strange results at times. "And if you invoke the Father, him which without acception of persons judgeth according to every one's work, in fear converse ye the time of your peregrination" (I Peter 1:17). "And beneficence and communication do not forget, for with such hosts God is promerited" (Hebrews 13:16). "Or what permutation shall a man give for his soul?" (Mark 8:37). "And a certain young man followed him clothed with sindon upon the bare" (Mark 14:51). Where Rheims-Douai diction was good, it was very, very good; and where it was bad, it was—un-English.

When James VI of Scotland became King of England in 1603, Puritan leaders promptly submitted to him a list of grievances. At the Hampton Court Conference, which met in January, 1604, to consider the condition of the Church, Dr. John Reynolds of Oxford proposed among other things a new translation of the Scriptures. This suggestion attracted James, and he directed that the work should be undertaken. He had no love for Puritans but welcomed a chance to oppose the popular Geneva Bible, which he detested. He "could never yet see a Bible well translated in English," he said, but the Geneva was the worst of all. Some of its notes he found seditious: for example, one to Exodus 1:19, which, he complained, "alloweth disobedience to kings." (The note condemns the Hebrew midwives' deceit but says their disobedience "was lawful"). The King laid down conditions for the new translation (not all of which were kept) and made some elaborate plans.

Fifty-four churchmen, a number later reduced by four or five, were appointed to the task. They worked in six companies or committees, two at Westminster, two at Oxford, and two at Cambridge. Two members of each group, or twelve in all,

constituted a board of revision to pass on the work of the rest. A well-known note by the contemporary jurist and scholar John Selden tells what the companies' method was: "That part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a tongue . . . and then they met together and one read the translation, the rest holding in their hands some Bible, either of the learned tongues or French, Spanish, Italian, etc. If they found any fault, they spoke; if not, he read on." The final editors were Bishops Bilson of Winchester and Smith of Gloucester.

Instructions to the companies made clear that their labor was to be one of revision rather than of fresh translation. They were to follow the Bishops' Bible, altering it only where necessary, but had permission to use the Tyndale, Coverdale, and Geneva versions where these were superior to the Bishops'. The "old ecclesiastical words" were to be kept, marginal notes avoided. That is, the companies were to improve the Bishops' if they could; where they could not, they were to let it alone. "Truly, good Christian reader," affirms their preface, "we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better; or out of many good ones, one principal good one." A copy of the Bishops' Bible surviving in the Bodleian Library contains certain manuscript changes which apparently represent an intermediate stage between the text of the Bishops' and that of the King James. This evidence, together with that in a Lambeth Palace manuscript book containing one company's work on the epistles of the New Testament, indicates that the final revisers did more than arrange the materials submitted and scrutinize them for accuracy. They improved style, sometimes rejecting the companies' changes, sometimes making phrases shorter and more direct and giving them their now familiar shape.

This most famous of English Bibles was printed by Robert Barker and issued sometime in 1611, a large black-letter folio, dedicated to the King. Since the first edition did not satisfy the apparently unforeseen demand, a new one was undertaken in the same year, and in 1612 two quartos and two octavos were

added. From time to time corrected texts appeared, notably in 1629 and 1638.

James had informed the bishops that the Bible was to be reviewed by them, submitted to the Privy Council, and finally ratified by royal authority. This procedure was not followed, nor was this Bible ever formally "authorized." It was, says the title-page, "appointed to be read in churches," but no proclamation or injunction enforcing this was issued. It soon superseded the Bishops'. To dislodge the Geneva took longer, but even Geneva could not hold out against it longer than a generation.

To appraise the diction of this Bible is not easy. Christians familiar from childhood with its phrases and rhythms treasure the book for its associations but for that very reason cannot always judge it dispassionately. For a long time, uninformed veneration or the substitution of admiration for analysis threatened to put this version above criticism. Probably most readers' preference for one translation over another owes more to associations or denominationalism than to anything else. One who grows up with the Prayer Book Psalter does not, apparently, come to prefer the Psalter in the King James Bible instead, however devoted he may be to the rest of that version. Readers brought up on the Geneva Bible did not change to the King James overnight; nor, in the nineteenth century, did readers of the King James change overnight to the Revised Version; nor have most users of the King James yet abandoned it for the recent Revised Standard Version, a scholarly work but (to those whose ears are accustomed to the cadences of 1611) a blight on public worship.

The King James Bible was a compromise, achieved in auspicious circumstances by conscientious and scholarly men who had a clear conception of their task and felt equal to it. They kept the Hebrew and Greek before them but borrowed from the Geneva, Rheims-Douai, and other versions when they thought they should. The companies followed their instructions with regard to the Bishops' Bible better than did the final revisers, who polished the work, recasting phrases for the sake of

clarity or cadence. Thus the result was no sudden miracle but rather the harvesting or refining of the previous century's experience in translating the Bible into English. Tyndale, Coverdale, and their successors stand behind it. The language of the 1611 Bible, particularly in the New Testament, is Tyndale's more than any other man's. All subsequent revisions except the Rheims-Douai were based on his, directly or indirectly, and although many of his words and rhythms were improved by the time they appeared in the King James version, his work remains the most important part of the fabric.

The supremacy of the King James is one of style, not of scholarship. The men who made it did not set out to manufacture a literary classic—classics are seldom made to order. Yet they did produce one: perhaps the only classic ever turned in by a committee, and one of the few books better in translation (at least this is true of the New Testament) than in the original. Whatever one's theories about the connection between great societies and great art, it can hardly be mere coincidence that the King James Bible came near the climax of a splendid epoch in English political and literary history. The English vocabulary was more capacious, the syntax more flexible and mature in every sense, in 1611 than in 1525. These facts alone do not "explain" Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, needless to say, but they helped to make it possible. The Jacobean translators inherited a general tradition of English prose and, within that tradition, another of Biblical prose established by Tyndale. They modified this somewhat. In the interests of dignity and reverence they archaized slightly. Tyndale had not; his translation had greater colloquial vigor. In poetical and prophetic passages their diction is appropriately ornate. They allowed themselves a free hand in the use of synonyms: a crucial decision, for it gave their language variations aesthetically pleasing as well as illuminating. Always to render the same Hebrew or Greek word by the same English equivalent would, they say justly, "savor more of curiosity than wisdom."

An obvious and fundamental characteristic of Biblical style is parallelism and repetition, one element (phrase or clause) being

balanced or contrasted with another. This is evident in all translations but never more felicitously than in the King James: "Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," "whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away," "strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees," "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped." Excessive parallelism is avoided by deliberate variety. If variety is the "secret" of the style, it is a secret whose techniques and effects are analyzable.

Perhaps the best way of appreciating the style is to study its cadences, for its most distinctive virtue is the adjustment of sound to sense. Here too our judgment may be biased by long familiarity with the book, but the judgment is virtually unanimous. The King James men had ears. As Jacobean they were more sensitive to speech rhythms and more practiced in them, far better trained in rhetoric and more respectful of it, than their modern successors, some of whom (to paraphrase Acts) much learning doth make tone-deaf.

The paradox of the book is that a work abounding in Hebraic and Hellenistic imagery and idiom could become something seemingly so English. Selden, the seventeenth-century writer previously quoted, marveled at its triumph: "The Bible is rather translated into English words than into English phrase," and Selden thought this fact made the Bible less intelligible to the plain reader. Some modern critics, echoing this complaint, have solemnly convicted the King James Bible of being "a very harmful influence on English prose." "Its alien imagery has nothing to do with us. . . . The plain, honest English speech was overwhelmed with ornament. Blunt Englishmen twisted their tongues to speak like Hebrew prophets."² This provocative judgment is more applicable to the Old Testament than to the New. That some of the imagery was "alien" is true; that most

² W. Somerset Maugham, *The Summing Up* (New York, 1938), p. 35; similarly C. V. Wedgwood, *Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (New York, 1950), pp. 15-17.

of it was too alien to be intelligible is hard to believe. The old translators would have been surprised to learn that Biblical imagery "has nothing to do with us." It had everything to do with them, they thought, because the text was sacred. So we return to our starting point: that, with regard to the Bible, questions of scholarship or literary criticism prove inseparable from questions of religion.

"*Scrutamini Scripturas* [search the Scriptures]. These two words have undone the world," wrote Selden; and the Reformation, the Wars of Religion in France, the Thirty Years' War, and the English Civil War must have suggested the same thought to others. To extraordinary numbers of Christians, however, the precept was compulsive, animating, worth any risk. That is why, when printing, religious change, and reasons of State gave them the open Bible at last, the English became the people of a book.

SUGGESTED READING

Works on the English Bible are so numerous that only a few of the most useful guides can be listed here. Good general bibliographies will be found in Ira M. Price, *The Ancestry of Our English Bible* (3d ed. rev. by W. A. Irwin and A. P. Wikgren; New York, 1956), and in C. C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible* (Philadelphia, 1941). The best collection of records is A. W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible* (Oxford, 1911). On editions see T. H. Darlow and H. T. Moule, *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of Holy Scripture in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, vol. I (London, 1903). Important sixteenth-century translations of the New Testament are printed in parallel columns and accompanied by the Greek text and the King James version in *The English Hexapla* (London, 1841).

On the background to Tudor translations: Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (rev. ed.; Oxford, 1952); B. F. Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible* (3d ed. rev. by W. A. Wright; London, 1905); Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible* (Cambridge, 1920); J. H. Penniman, *A Book about the English Bible* (2d ed.; Philadelphia, 1931); F. G. Kenyon, *The Story of the Bible* (London, 1936); H. Wheeler Robinson, ed., *The Bible in Its Ancient and English Versions* (Oxford, 1954); Luther A. Weigle, *The English New Testament* (London, 1950); Hugh Pope, *English Versions of the Bible* (rev. by S. Bullough; St. Louis, 1952); W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation* (Cambridge, 1955).

W. T. Whitley, *The English Bible under the Tudor Sovereigns* (London and Edinburgh, 1937) is a readable but not always reliable sketch. *William Tyndale* (London, 1937) and *Coverdale and His Bibles* (London, 1953), both by J. F. Mozley, are standard works. S. L. Greenslade, *The Work of William Tindale* (London and Glasgow, 1938) includes an essay on Tyndale's language by Gavin Bone. On the Rheims-Douai version, see J. G. Carleton, *The Part of Rheims*

in the Making of the English Bible (Oxford, 1902). James Strachan, *Early Bible Illustrations* (Cambridge, 1957) is an interesting study.

The facsimile edition, in somewhat reduced size, of the King James Bible, edited by A. W. Pollard (London, 1911), has a valuable introduction and contains most of the records printed in his *Records of the English Bible*. Tyndale's 1534 revision of his translation of the New Testament is available in a reprint edited by N. H. Wallis (Cambridge, 1938). Butterworth's book, mentioned above, prints in an appendix selections from many translations and shows what each contributed to the King James. On the intermediate stage of the revision of 1611, consult E. E. Willoughby, *The Making of the King James Bible* (Los Angeles, 1956). On the King James version and the Hebrew text, see David Daiches, *The King James Version of the Bible* (Chicago, 1941).

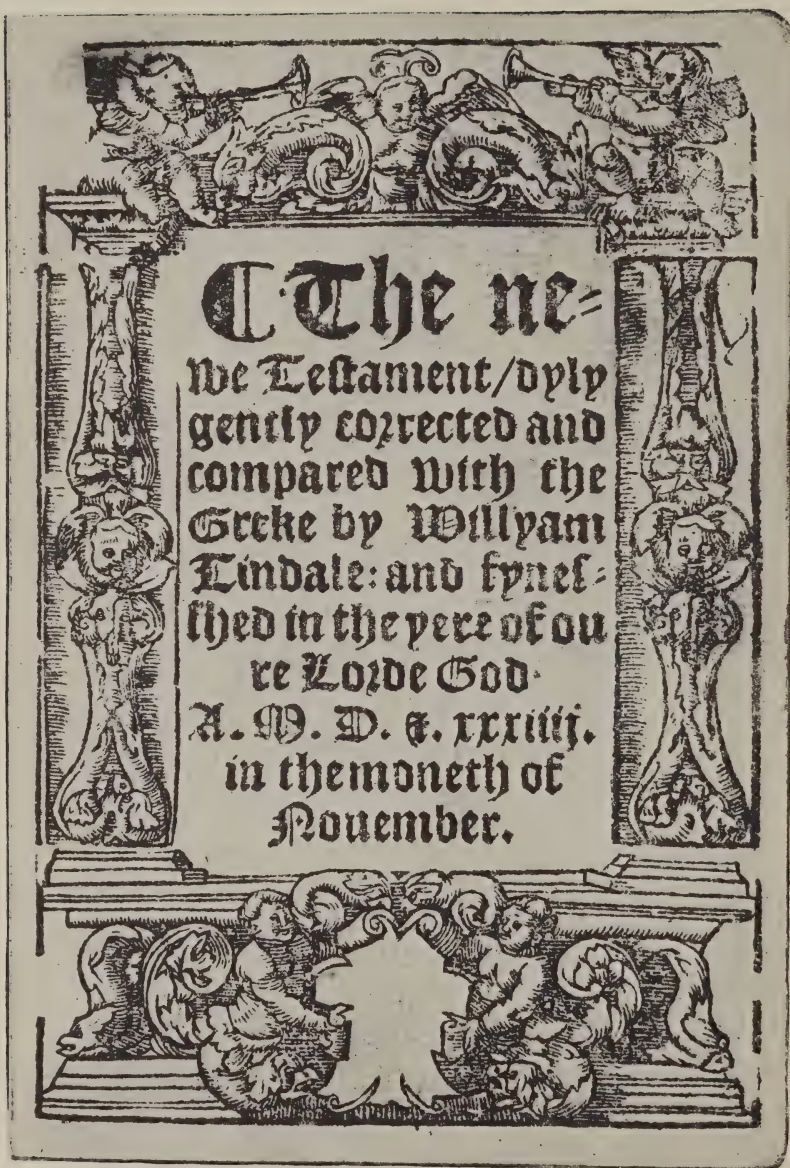
On questions of literary style in the translations, see R. G. Moulton, *The Literary Study of the Bible* (Boston, 1895); George Saintsbury, *History of English Prose Rhythm* (London, 1912); C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1954).

The figure of John Wycliffe.



King Edward the .iii. did Wicliffe deſed
 Where he did ſtudy in Oxford ſo long while
 But Richard ſ. ii. King did ſomthing bend
 To papitiſts bi whom Wicliffe was in exile
 Yet dyd thys good man neuer alter his ſtile
 But wrot many volumis whils he was alive
 To extinguiſh erreour, and truth to reſtore
 At the laſt he returned to his countrei againe
 And luyd at Lutterworth, where his charg
 And after his deſth he did ther remain (lay
 Forty winter & one, till come was the day
 Whe Satā was ſuffrid to ren without ſtate
 But the did oure clergie ſet open his graue
 And byt at his bonis, ſuch chariti thei haue

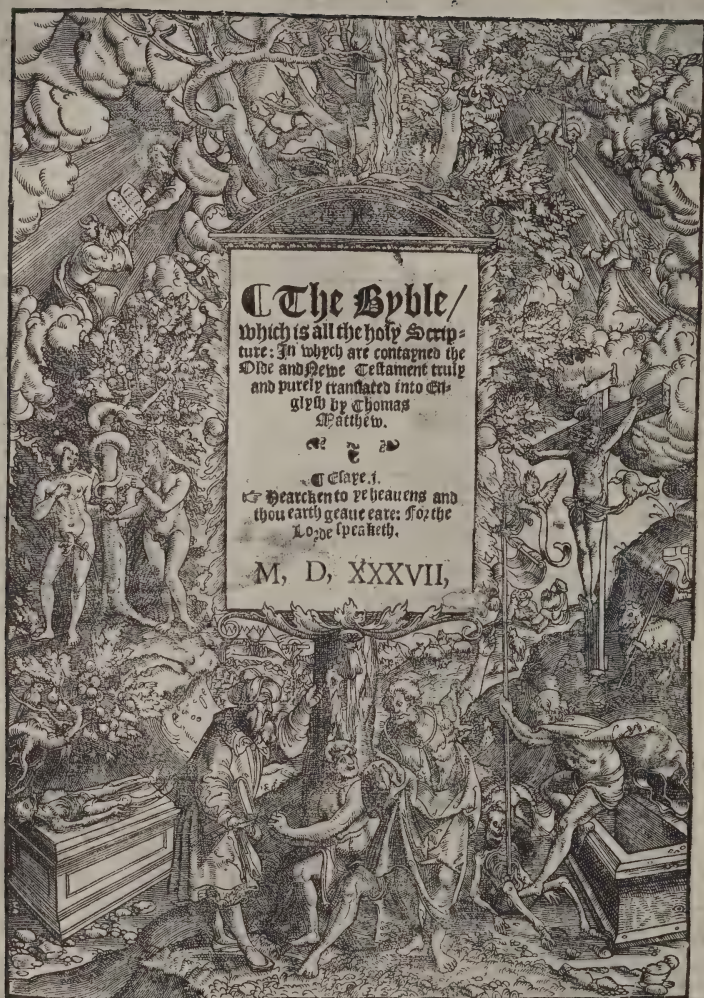
John Wyclif, ca. 1329–1384. From *The True Copy of a Prolog Written in an Old English Bible*, London, 1550. This “prolog” is Purvey’s introduction to his revision of the English Bible, ca. 1395.



Title-page of Tyndale's revised translation of the New Testament, 1534. (*University of Pennsylvania Library copy.*)



Coverdale's translation, 1535. The first complete Bible printed in English. The woodcuts on this title-page are the work of Hans Holbein. They show, at top left, Adam and Eve hearkening to the serpent; at top right, the Risen Lord; next below, at left, Moses; at right, Christ commissioning the Disciples; below, at left, the reading of the Law; at right, St. Peter preaching; in the center at bottom, King Henry VIII with bishops and nobles; at left, David; at right, St. Paul. (*University of Pennsylvania Library copy.*)



Set forth with the Kinges most gracious lycence.

The Matthew Bible, 1537, issued with official approval. (University of Pennsylvania Library copy.)

The holie Bible.



The Bishops' Version, 1568, with portrait of Queen Elizabeth on the title-page.

☛ The seconde part of the Byble con-
teyning these bookes.

The booke of Iosuah.
The booke of the Iudges.
The booke of Ruth.
The first booke of Samuel.
The seconde booke of Samuel.
The thirde booke of the kinges.
The fourth booke of the kinges.

The first booke of the Chronicles.
The seconde booke of the Chronicles.
The first booke of Esdras.
The seconde booke of Esdras.
The booke of Hester.
The booke of Iob.



Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Portrait in the Bishops' Bible, 1568.

THE NEW TESTAMENT OF OUR LORD

IESVS CHRIST,

Conferred diligently with the Greke, and best approved translations in diuers languages.

EXOD. XIII, VER. XIII.

FEARE YE NOT, STAND STILL, AND TELL
holde the saluacion of the Lord, which he wil shewe to you this day.



God and the multitude of the people

for the Lord delivereth them out of all, 2. Cor. 1. 10.

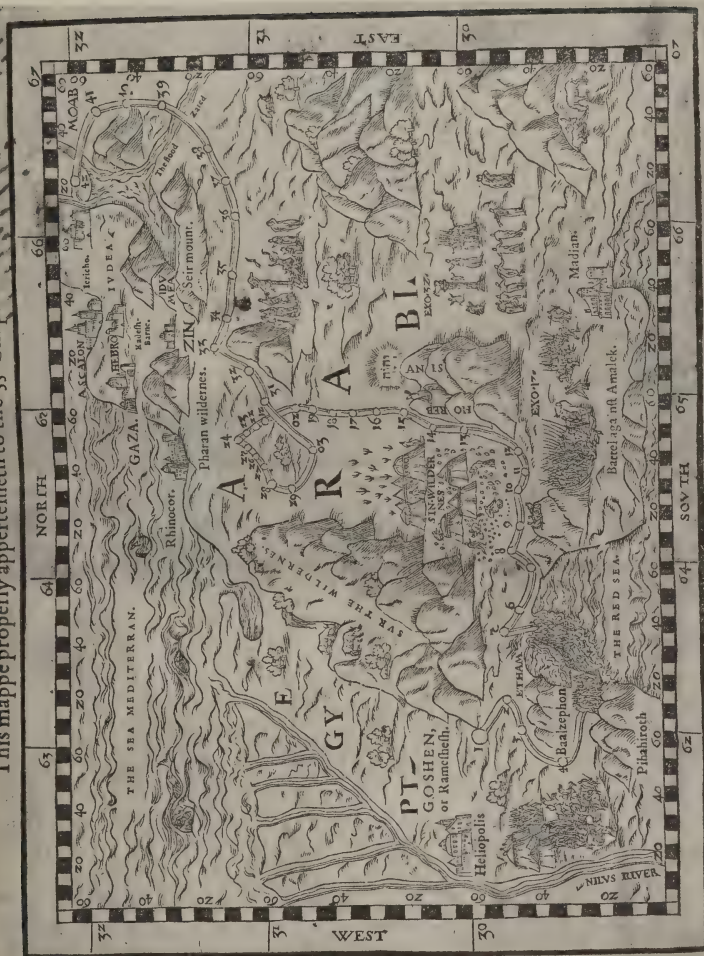
THE LORD SHALL FIGHT FOR YOU:
therefore holde you your peace, Exod. 14, vers. 14.

AT GENEVA.

PRINTED BY ROULAND HALL.

M. D. LX.

The New Testament in the Geneva Bible, 1560.



This mappe declareth the wayes which the Israelites went for the space of fourty yeres from Egypt through the wildernesses of Arabia until they entred into the land of Canaan; as it is mentioned in Exodus, Numbers, & Deuter. It containeth also the 41 places where they pitched their tentes, which are named Nomies. It with the observation of the degrees, concerning the length and the breadth, and the places of their abode, set out by numbers.

Map from the Geneva Bible, 1560.

THE
NEVV TESTAMENT
OF IESVS CHRIST, TRANS-
LATED FAITHEVLLY INTO ENGLISH.

out of the authentical Latin, according to the best corrected copies of the same, diligently conferred vwith the Greeke and other editions in diuers languages; Vwith ARGVMENTS of bookes and chapters, ANNOTATIONS, and other necessarie helpes, for the better vnderstanding of the text, and specially for the discoverie of the CORRUPTIONS of diuers late translations, and for clearing the CONTROVERSIES in religion, of these daies:

IN THE ENGLISH COLLEGE OF RHEMES.

Psal. n8.

Da mihi intellectum, & seruatbor legem tuam, & custodiam illam in toto corde meo.

That is,

Giue me vnderstanding, and I vvill seache thy lawe, and vvill keepe it vwith my vvhole hart.

S. Aug. tract. 1. in Epist. Ioan.

Omnia quæ leguntur in Scripturis sanctis, ad instructionem & salutem nostram intentè oportet audire: maxime tamen memoris commendanda sunt, quæ aduersus hæreticos valens plurimum: quorum infidèle, infirmiores quosquæ & negligentiores circumueniendus cessant.

That is,

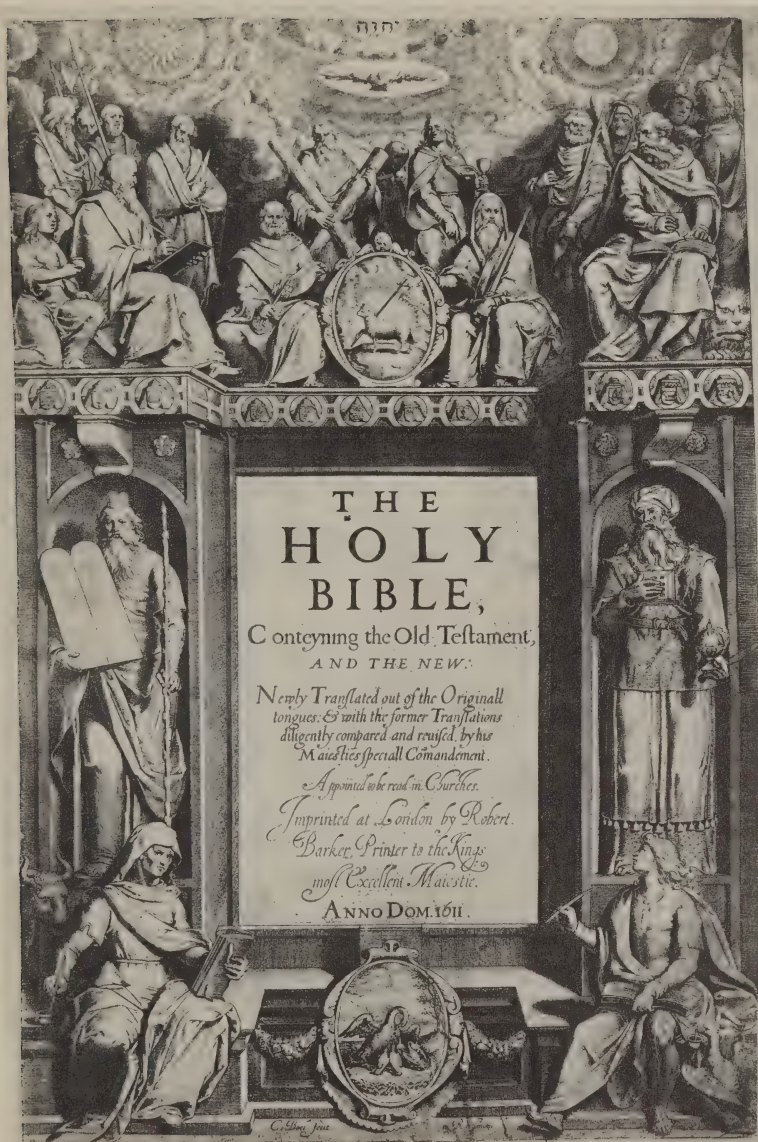
All things that are readde in holy Scriptures, we must heare vwith great attention, to our instruction and saluation: but those things specially must be commended to memorie, vvhich make most against Heretikes: vvhoſe deceites cease not to circūuent and beguile al the vv weaker fort and the more negligent persons.

PRINTED AT RHEMES,
by Iohn Fogny.

1582.

CVM PRIVILEGIO.

The Rheims New Testament, 1582.



The most famous of English translations, the “Authorized” or “King James” Bible of 1611. (Yale University Library copy.)

19 For if they were all one member, where were the bodies?

20 But now are there manie membres, yet but one bodie.

21 And theye can not say vnto the hand, I haue no nede of thee: nor the head a-gaine to the fete, I haue no nede of you.

22 Yea, muche rather those membres of the bodie, which seme to be more feble, are necessarie.

23 And vpon those membres of the bodie, which we thinke moste vn honest, put we more honestie on: and our vncemelic partes haue more comelines on.

24 For our comelic partes nede it not: but God hath tempered the bodie together, and hath giuen the more honour to that parte which lacked;

25 Left there shulde be anie diuision in the bodie: but that the members shulde haue the same care one for another.

26 Therefore if one member suffer, all suffer with it: if one member be had in honour, all the membres reioyce with it.

27 Now ye are the bodie of Christ, & membres of it for your parte.

28 And God hath ordered some in the Church: as first, Apostles, secondly Prophets, thirdly teachers, then them that do miracles: after that, the giftes of healing, & helpers, & gouernours, diuerfitie of tongues.

29 Are all Apostles? are all Prophets? are all teachers?

30 Are all doers of miracles? haue all the giftes of healing? do all speake with tongues? do all interpret?

31 But desire you the best gifts, and I wil yet shewe you a more excellent way.

CHAP. XIII.

Because loue is the fountaine and rule of edifying the Church, he setteth forth the nature, office and praise thereof.

1 I Hough I speake with the tongues of men and Angels, and haue not loue, I am as sounding brasse, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I had the gift of prophecie, and knewe all secretes and all knowledge, yea, if I had all faith, so that I colde remove mountaines and had not loue, I were nothing.

3 And though I fede the poore with all my goods, and though I giue my bodie, that I be burned, and haue not loue, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Loue suffereth long: it is bountifull: loue enuieheth not: loue doeth not boast it self: it is not puffed vp:

5 It is diffidant: it seeketh not her owne things: it is not prouoked to anger: it thinketh not euill:

6 It reioyceth not in iniquitie, but reioy-

ceth in the truth:

7 It suffereth all things: it beleueth all things: it hopeth all things: it endureth all things:

8 Loue doeth neuer fall away, though that prophecies be abolished, or the tongues cease, or knowledge vanish away.

9 For we knowe in parte, and we prophesie in parte.

10 But when that which is perfite, is come, then that which is in parte, shalbe abolished.

11 When I was a childe, I spake as a childe, I vnderstode as a childe, I thought as a childe: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glasse darkely: but then shal we see face to face. Now I knowe in parte: but then shal I knowe eu as I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope & loue, these three: but the chiefest of these is loue.

CHAP. XIII.

He exhorteth to loue, commendeth the gift of tongues, & other spiritual gifts, & But chiefly prophesying. He commandeth women to kepe silence in the Church, And sheweth what good order ought to be observed to the Church.

1 Fallowe after loue, and couet spiritual gifts, and rather that ye maye prophesie.

2 For he that speaketh a strange tongue, speaketh not vnto men, but vnto God: for no man heareth him: howbeit in the spirit he speaketh secret things.

3 But he that prophesieth, speaketh vnto men to edifying, and to exhortacion, and to comfort.

4 He that speaketh strange language, edifieth him self: but he that prophesieth, edifieth the Church.

5 I wolde that ye all spake strange languages, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth, the he that speaketh diuers tongues, except he expounde it, that the Church may receiue edification.

6 And now, brethren, if I come vnto you speaking diuers tongues, what shal I profite you, except I speake to you, ether by reuelacion, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

7 Moreouer things without life which giue a founde, whether it be a pipe or an harpe, except they make a distinction in the founds, how shal it be known what is piped or harped?

8 And also if the trumpet giue an vncertaine founde, who shal prepare him self to battell?

9 So likewise you, by the tongue, except ye vnter wordes that haue signification, how

XX.ii.

13 That is, to be abused, but iudgeth others by all loue & humanitie.

14 Which may be without offence of Gods worde.

15 Knowledge is that which shall be perfite in this world to come, & not abolished: but the manner of knowing & teaching shall cease, when we shall be face to face with God.

16 That is, imperfectly.

17 The mystery of God.

18 Because it searcheth both here & in the life to come.

19 But faith and hope appeare only to this life.

20 That is, to expounde the worde of God to the edification of the Church.

21 Vnderstand him.

22 By the spiritual gift, which he hath receiued.

23 For he profiteth none save him self.

24 The prophet that God hath rauished: & the vnderstanding teacher, whom which he hath giuen vs to vnderstand.

25 For he.

The first Epistle

With it. If one member be had in honour, all the members reioyce with it.

27 We are the body of Christ, and members one of another.

Math. x. a.
Luk. xii. a.
Eph. i. iiii. a.

28 And God hath ordeyned some in the Church, first Apostles, secondarily, prophetes, thirdly teachers, then them that do miracles: after that, the giftes of healing, helpers, gouernours, diuer-

sitie of tongues.

29 Are all, Apostles: are all, prophetes: are all, teachers:

30 Are all, doers of miracles: haue all the giftes of healing: Do all speake with tongues: Do all interpret:

31 Couet after the best giftes: And yet theſe I vnto you a moze excellent way,

The. xiiij. Chapter.

Because loue is the fountayne and rule of edifying the Church, he setteth forth the nature, office, and prayse thereof.

1 If the
Angels haue
tongues, and
I haue the life
cherof and be-
lieue this is profit
my neigh-
bour, it were
nothing but
vain bab-
bling.
Luk. xvi. a.

Although I speake with the tongues of men and of Angels, and haue not loue, I am (as) sounding brasse, or (as) a tinkling Cimball:

2 And though I coulde prophesse, and vnderstoode all secretes, and all knowledge: yea, if I had all faith, to that I coulde moue mountaynes out of their places, and haue not loue, I were nothing.

3 And though I bestowe all my goodes to feede the poore, and though I geue my body that I burned, and haue not loue, it profiteth me nothing.

25 4 Loue suffereth long, and is courteous: Loue enuieeth not, loue doeth not proudly, swelleth not,

1 Cor. x. c.
Philip. i. a.

5 Dealeth not dishonestly, seeketh not her owne, is not prouoked to anger, thinketh none euill,

6 Reioyceth not in iniquitie: but reioy-

ceeth in the trueth:

7 Suffereth all thynges, beleeueth all thynges, hopeth all thynges, endureth all thynges.

8 Though prophesynges faile, other tongues cease, or knowledge vanishe away, (yet) loue faileth neuer away.

9 For our knowledge is imperfect, and our prophesying is imperfect:

10 But when that which is perfect, is come, then that which is imperfect shall be done away.

11 When I was a childe, I spake as a childe, I vnderstoode as a childe, I imagined as a childe: But as soon as I was a man, I put away childishnesse.

12 So be ye see in a glasse, euen in a darke speaking: but then shall we see face to face. So be I knowe imperfectly: but then shall I knowe euen as I am knowen.

13 So be abydeyth faith, hope, and loue, these three, but the chiefe of these is loue.

The. xiiij. Chapter.

He exhorteth to loue, commendeth the gift of tongues, and other spirituall giftes; But chiefly prophesying. 34 He commandeth women to kepe silence in the Church. 40 And sheweth what good order ought to be obserued in the Church.

11 If
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Luk. xvi. a.

So be after loue, and couet spirituall giftes: but most chiefele that ye may prophesie.

2 For he that speaketh with the tongue, speaketh not vnto men, but vnto God: for no man heareth hym. howbeit, in the spirit he speaketh misteries.

3 But he that prophesieeth, speaketh vnto men to their edifying, to their exhortation, and to their comfort.

4 He that speaketh with the tongue,

edifieth hym selfe: he that prophesieeth, edifieth the Church.

5 I woulde ye al speake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieeth, then he that speaketh with tongues, except he expounde it, that the Church may haue edifying.

6 So be brethren, if I come vnto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I speake to you either by reuelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine:

7 Wherefore, thynges without life ge-

Rom. xii. b.
Nun. x. g.

1 Cor. x. c.
Philip. i. a.

1 Cor. x. c.
Philip. i. a.

DATE DUE

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Gaylord 

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The Bible in English : 1525-1611

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